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GHOSTS AND THE PROJECTION OF VISUAL IMAGES¹

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Some tests recently made with three Stanford students who reported that they had seen apparitions show most clearly that whether we will see ghosts at all and what their appearance will be depends upon whether we normally project our visual images into space or are able to do so under the influence of a strong emotional stimulus. I give first, in the following, what the students gave to protocol in regard to the apparitions they had seen, and then briefly summarize the results of the tests I have made with them regarding their ability to project visual and other images.

I. Mr. M., special student in Chemistry.

"Time of appearance of the apparition—the first Sunday afternoon in May, 1908. Quite normal in health. I was reading with much interest in Mendeléeff's 'Principles of Chemistry.' That I was awake I am quite sure, as my sister had just passed through the room and we had spoken. Quite suddenly the book seemed to disappear, and in its place came the appearance of a man, head and shoulders. He wore a battered sombrero and soft dark shirt, open to the second button. About him was the seeming of brilliant sunlight and air of crystalline purity, and the sense of high places and much living out-of-doors. Though I could not see it, I knew that he carried a gun, probably a rifle, under his right arm, possibly suggested by the set of the shoulder. The face was attractive at first glance, rather handsome—or easily might have been. The skin was clear and beautifully bronzed. He looked back at me with a clear, open, frank gaze, with a half-smile on his face. But about him there was a swagger, a braggadocio, an insistence upon his own importance and his will to dominate without much consideration for the other fellow, that, though it was not consciously emphasized on his part, irritated me and left me somewhat ill at ease. He remained quite two minutes, while we stared at each other. The smile, somewhat superciliously amused, grew broader, and then slowly he faded away and the book blurred back into place. I finished the sentence and the paragraph.

Time, June 2nd, 1908, about midnight. I had been out to call, had particularly enjoyed the evening and had stayed late. I was sitting

¹ Martin:—Die Projektionsmethode und die Lokalisation visueller und anderer Vorstellungsbilder. Zeit. f. Psych., Bd. 61 (1912), p. 321, and published in book form by Barth, Leipzig.

on the edge of my bed unlacing my shoes. Suddenly I sensed another personality present and looked up quickly in surprise and inquiry. The same man stood across the room from me, perhaps ten feet away. The entire figure was visible. He was dressed much as before, but without the hat or the gun. If before his self-assurance had irritated me, there was now about him a conscious, purposeful, insistent masterfulness that I would not and could not endure. It aroused an instant and fiery antagonism. My feeling was—though I did not say it—“You get out of here, quick!” Yet I had a decided impression that he wanted something that I might give. But he did not ask, but demanded, in impossible ways. It seemed, too, that his manner was a pose, assumed as much to impose upon himself as upon me. A bit of unacknowledged fear lurked somewhere back in his consciousness. All this, somehow, I knew. He stared at me a moment, with his insolently irritating smile, took three steps to the side and diagonally toward me, and suddenly disappeared. The incident left me so irritated that I slept little. Early in the morning of June 3rd I left for the “High Sierra” on a two months’ camping trip.

About three weeks later, when we reached the upper canyon of the Kern River, I had a very strong and quite unreasonable, persistent desire to go farther up the canyon, which was not possible at the time. This desire, after a day or so, associated itself with a strong sense of the personality of the man described above though I saw nothing. So compelling became the desire under the stimulus of this association that one night, somewhat after midnight, I walked almost without volition of my own, perhaps six miles up the trail in the moonlight until an impassible stream halted me. I seemed to *know* that this man was there up the canyon, and because he was there was I compelled to go.

We camped, three days after this experience, at the edge of Monachi Meadows. About midnight I was awakened, very suddenly, by someone shaking me roughly by the shoulder. I sat up. The same man stood beside me, hatless, but with his gun. I saw the glint of the moonlight on the gun barrel when he moved. He seemed to be in overwhelming terror. The qualities in him that had so irritated me before were quite gone,—the braggart was become the craven. I knew, somehow, that he came as a suppliant. He said nothing, nor did I. After staring at me a moment, his head drooped in sudden hopelessness, and he walked away.

On the first occasion I could not see the book through the man just described. The second time, he was transparent, so that a chiffonier back of him was quite visible. So, too, the third time, I saw the trunk of a tree through him. That is, he was opaque the first time, but semi-transparent on the two other occasions.

In 1901, in connection with philosophy course, given by Dr. Lovejoy, I read much Hindu philosophy; and I remember that Dr. Lovejoy talked in his lectures of Egyptian religious beliefs, among others. I was much troubled that spring by a series of apparitions. I do not remember just when or under what circumstances these apparitions commenced, nor how many times they occurred, but they occurred very frequently. The details of each occasion of their appearance, what they did and said, I do not recall. One frequent astral visitor was a Hindu, seemingly a pundit or yogin; another, less frequent, was an ancient Egyptian, whom I much disliked. Upon the appearing of these apparitions I would be first conscious of the eyes, from which point the rest of the figures would slowly develop downward. Their

disappearing was the reverse process, from the feet to the eyes, which would persist sometimes much longer, at times for hours. The figures always were semi-transparent, though very distinct, so that objects were quite visible through them. They frequently talked to me. The Hindu, particularly, would deliver long discourses to me which at the time seemed the profoundest of wisdom, but which, upon later analysis, I always found to be a vague jumble of meaningless phrases. At first I permitted these apparitions because they amused me, and I could banish them at will. But later they became more persistent and I could not rid myself of them. Particularly the eyes would appear and follow me, without the rest of the figure becoming visible, which caused me much annoyance and distress. I remember quite distinctly the last occasion on which I saw them. I was alone in the country. Upon arising in the morning about 7:30 I went to the piano to play. Suddenly I saw the eyes of the Hindu above the piano. Of what happened thereafter I know nothing. I found myself at 9:30 in the evening exceedingly weary, still sitting upright at the piano. I do not know whether this was normal sleep or of a hypnotic nature. I had had some slight experience with auto-hypnosis, having on several occasions put myself to sleep by looking at a bright object, first resolving to awake in five or ten minutes.² I was so frightened by this experience at the piano that I thereupon determined never to see these particular apparitions, or their eyes, again, nor to go to sleep without my own volition, nor have I. I have, however, occasionally seen other eyes. For instance, a few evenings ago I was reading in bed when a single eye, about four inches long, appeared back and at the right side of my book. I glanced at it and continued my reading. Presently the eye came nearer and slid over the edge of the book. It was transparent, and the words were quite visible through it. It persisted about ten minutes. In general in looking at persons I am quite conscious of their eyes, as the eyes are to me the most noticeable and important feature of the face; just as the head is of greater importance than the rest of the figure to me. In looking back at this whole experience I see clearly that it is all to be explained by the projection of visual and other images, perhaps with auto-hypnosis as a subordinate factor.

As a child, from my earliest recollections to the age of about twelve, I had a considerable number of imaginary playmates who seemed very real to me and of whom I was very fond, so that I cared little to associate with other children. To each of them I gave a name, and each was a distinct and well characterized personality. When they finally ceased one by one to come to see me I often regretted their absence and wondered what had become of them. It was therefore, a matter of great surprise, in 1905, to meet on the street in Palo Alto, a young man (Dr. A. L. Münger, Jr.), whom at once I recognized as Futoni, one of those friends of my childhood. The fancy still persists that the two are identical. And I have since met two other men who just as surely are identical with my imaginary friends. These expe-

² We see from this experience of Mr. M. that with him as a reagent we could doubtless easily have developed, artificially, at that time, a state of "Trance," and thus have been able to study the origin and evolution of a "medium." It would not have been necessary at the time of this occurrence to build up the "controls" by means of suggestion for they were already at hand in the persons of the Egyptian and Hindu.

riences of my childhood made me immediately accept as self-evident the theosophical idea of reincarnation when it was by chance presented to me in later years. That this particular group of apparitions were projected visual and other images, I am satisfied. As to their character, I am still in doubt, for my early environment does not seem to me to adequately account for their content."

I add still one more of Mr. M.'s projected visual images. "After spending the afternoon of Wednesday, March 18, 1914, in the petrography laboratory working at the same microscope with Mr. H., I called upon Mr. W. in Palo Alto. As Mr. W. and I were walking to the street-car about six o'clock, I saw a transparent image of Mr. H. walking just in front of Mr. W. on my left. When I left Mr. W. the image of Mr. H. followed me aboard the car, sat by my side, and went home with me. I confess I had a strong impulse formally to present him to my wife. The image sat in a chair in the living room when we went in to dinner. He was in the same chair after dinner, remaining with the family for half an hour. When I went upstairs to read the image followed me and remained until nine o'clock, when he walked out of the room."

Tests with Mr. M. in the laboratory, show: (1) That his visual images are strong and that when he casually thinks of an object such images are located in the back of his head, but if he thinks of the object in detail the image of it is out in front of him, the distance away depending upon the circumstances under which the image is seen. (2) When he projects visual images of persons he has seen, they are translucent. He does not usually see through such images but can easily do so. The transparency of his hunter, etc., images, was doubtless due to the presence of the bright light which was so emphasized as to divide the attention as, for example, in the case of seeing of the "glint" of the moonlight on the sun. (3) When he thinks in the laboratory in detail of the hunter, the projected visual image which appears has the same general appearance as the corresponding apparition except that it is slightly less transparent. The projected image in the laboratory seems "hardly as real" as his apparition, however. He feels it is an image of his apparition, that is, that it seems to have the same relation to it as does the projected image of an object. The emotional experience with its kinaesthetic accompaniments localized largely in the back of his neck and arms (he has a very slight lesion in the back of his neck which produces at times, a feeling of numbness and a dull ache in his arms), which are elements of the feeling of reality, are there but they are much decreased in strength. This hallucinatory experience as well as others like it show that it is not alone necessary to be able to project one's visual images and to do it usually or very frequently in order to have a hallucination. Mr. M. does on occasions when he has no hallucinations.

Other persons who have strong visual images and usually project them have never seen an apparition. The hallucination image must have a content or be accompanied by an emotion which separates it out from other projected visual images. (4) Mr. M.'s auditory images are projected. When he thinks of a sound he hears it again and it seems to come from where it originally came. (5) He can project touch images very imperfectly.

II. Miss T., a student in the German Department, graduated at Stanford University in December, 1913. Early in December I was told that Miss T. had seen a ghost. I give below a curtailed account of the interviews I had with her concerning the apparition she had seen.

December 8, 1913, evening. My own study. Miss T. said:—"I was awakened with a start on the night of December 5th, at 2:15 a. m. When I opened my eyes I saw my ghost, which I had often seen before, standing in my window. He has a high forehead, very hollow eyes, which appear to be only black blotches. His eyebrows are very dark; nose large; very sunken cheeks, and a very prominent chin. He wears a long white flowing robe. His hands are thin and bony. I lay in bed and looked at him. He did not move. He had a long chain in his hand. My bed is next to the window, so by putting out my hand I could have touched him. Finally I sat up. When I did so, he vanished out on the porch (which is off of my room) and sat on a couch out there. I got up and turned on my light and I could still see him, just as plain as when it was dark. Then I took my eyes off him and looked in the mirror to see if I were awake. Then I looked back and my ghost was still sitting in the same position. I crossed my room and turned on another light. He followed me, keeping about three feet behind me. I looked for the feet of the ghost but could not see them, on account of the long robes. Then I went out in the hall into another room. He followed. While I was in this room he stood in the open door. When I came out he stepped out of the way and allowed me to pass. He followed me until I reached my door and then vanished."

"Were you afraid of him?" "No. He fascinates me. I never want him to leave."

"Why not?" "I have always felt he would bring me good luck."

"Why did he come at this time?" "I do not know. But about five days before, our housemother had remarked that it was about time for my ghost to appear."

"Did he speak?" "No."

"How do you explain this ghost?" "I have always explained this as an hallucination, yet I have a feeling that it is a spirit and have always felt this. I feel that it comes from another world, of which we know nothing."

"What do you mean by an hallucination?" "It is a visual image so firmly fixed in one's mind, that it appears without any conscious effort on the part of the person."

"Did the ghost bring any message?" "No."

"Has it ever brought a message?" "No."

Room was darkened. "Can you see the ghost now?" "No. But I saw a large rectangle of white."

Second trial. "Even feeling that it would be a good omen, didn't make it come." (She has just written me that she has after many trials succeeded in getting a visual image of the ghost but only with closed eyes.)

"Give an account of previous experiences with this apparition." "It first appeared when I was about twelve years old. It was my idea of a ghost, from stories. It has appeared since on the average of twice a year. The apparition always appears in the window and grows more distinct each time. The other night it was closer to me than it ever had been, except in one instance. On this occasion, it came and sat on my bed, and was about to speak to me, when I called my roommate. The room was dark. The minute I spoke it vanished. I am sorry I called because I am sure it would have spoken to me. This ghost is always the same in appearance but always carries something different. I remember that once it had a large red book, another time an umbrella, and another time a key."

"Have you ever had any other similar experiences?" "No."

"Did you read ghost stories as a child?" "Only a few. My mother did not approve of my reading them."

"Was there anyone who encouraged you to read them?" "My aunt occasionally told me ghost stories."

"Is there any one in your family who believes in ghosts?" "No."

"What is your physical and mental condition in general when the ghost appears?" "It comes at times when I am physically well, happy, and not mentally tired."

Tests:—Instructed her to recall in turn, Dr. Jordan, Miss McCracken, etc., and to see them out in the room before her. She reported that she saw each person distinctly.

"Do they appear solid?" "Yes."

"Can you see Mrs. Herd?" "No, I don't know her very well."

"Can you put a chair at the side of this real chair?" "Yes: It is almost as real as the chair itself."

Pointing at a reproduction of Raphael's Sibyls, hanging on the wall, "Can you place at the side of that picture another like it?" "In general composition, yes, but not in detail." Repeated with Böcklin's Selbstportrait. "I can get Böcklin and the frame and mat clearly. The frame, however, is not as clear as the chair was."

Miss T. remarked during this visit that she was going to question the ghost next time. I suspect it will reply for trial showed she has the ability to project auditory images. Her images of touch are also projectable. She says this ghost is a proof or confirmation of what all her reading has more and more convinced her, namely, that there must be another world. Recently Miss T. has sent me some notes found in her diary in regard to the ghost. February 2, 1901:—"My dear old ghost was here last night. He had a Latin Grammar with him. I hope he doesn't have to struggle as I do with the subjunctive." July 15, 1901:—"The idea of carrying an umbrella in the middle of summer! That's all the sense my ghost has. He came bouncing in with an umbrella last night. He closed it as he entered through my window. He was so busy seeing if he could find any holes in my stockings, that he forgot to take his umbrella with him when he left. I couldn't find it any place in my room this morning, though I looked everywhere. I guess he came back and got it when I was asleep." January 9, 1902:—"My old ghost amuses me so. Last night, he did a fancy dance at my window. Then he came and rested in my rocking chair. The nerve of him! As soon as I spoke he vanished."

In my office two days after the tests mentioned above when I repeated some of them with like results. Miss T. gave me her reasons for not believing the ghost is merely a projected visual image:—1. The fact that the ghost came when she was well made her feel it was a real ghost for she supposed projected images came when one was tired or not well. 2. The fact that she was not afraid of it also made her feel it was real. 3. She cannot project her ghost at will or make it come at night when she wished. 4. She said, after I had tested her regarding her ability to project her visual images, that she had thought in the past that the ghost was more real than a projected visual image but recent trial with projecting the image of a very intimate friend had convinced her that the ghost was no more real than the image of the friend. She added that neither the ghost nor her friend's image follow her eyes in turning her head. The ghost, she also said, followed her when she walked away but her friend did not and then added, "she is very deliberate."

It will be seen from what has been just said, that Miss T. is ordinarily able not alone to project her visual but also her auditory and tactile images and yet she is not able to project her ghost at will. This fact shows that the ability to project one's images is but one of the factors involved in the seeing of ghosts. In the case of this ghost there is not only a favoring emotional factor which is connected with its appearing but one of an inhibitory character which interferes with its arising except on propitious occasions. The favoring and inhibiting emotional complex which has prevented a very lively visual image of childhood from disappearing is doubtless of a religious nature. The ghost coming, as its seer believes, from another world, is a source of intellectual comfort. Through its presence she has been enabled to successfully resist that skepticism regarding the existence of another world which she thinks might otherwise have been engendered by her University studies.

III. Mr. ———, student in the Department of Philosophy.

Lack of space prevents me from giving a detailed account of the numerous apparitions seen by Mr. ———. One observation I wish, however, to draw attention to as it is another confirmation of my opinion that ghosts arise only where one is able to project his images. Mr. ——— is able without difficulty to project his apparitions into space but he tells me that the images of his apparitions and the apparitions themselves communicate with him largely through signs. He very rarely hears them speak. Their preference for the gesture language was readily understood when it was found that all of his auditory images were very weak and that he is able only with great difficulty, if at all, to project them into space.